

Message Text

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TO USDOC

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AMEMBASSY ATHENS

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USDOC FOR CAGNE: ATHENS FOR RTDO

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BEXP, SY

SUBJECT: AFTOMETAL'S DESIRE TO INCREASE IMPORTS FROM UNITED STATES

1. NIZAR EL-KHANI, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AFTOMETAL, CALLED EMBASSY COMMERCIAL OFFICER TO HIS OFFICE JULY 26 FOR A GENERAL REVIEW OF HIS AGENCY'S ACTIVITIES AND TO EXPRESS HIS INTEREST IN INCREASING TRADE WITH US. AFTOMETAL IS PUBLIC SECTOR COMPNAY WITH EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO IMPORT IRON AND STEEL, CEMENT AND TIBER PORDUCTS INTO SYRIA.

2. ACCORDING TO KHANI, AFTOMETAL'S BUSINESS HAS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY SINCE 1973, AS MUCH OF THE MATERIAL TO SERVICE SYRIA'S CONSTRUCTION BOOM IS IMPORTED THROUGH HIS AGENCY. AFTOMETAL IMPORTS IN 1975 TOTALLED \$246 MILLION DOLLARS AND PROJECTED IMPORTS FOR 1976 SHOULD REACH ABOUT \$410 MILLION DOLLARS. US SHARE IN 1975 WAS LESS THAN TWO MILLION DOLLARS, MOSTLY TIN PLATE. AFTOMETAL PUCHASES FROM THE US IN 1976 TO DATE HAVE BEEN ONLY 190,000 DOLLARS OF TIN PLATE AND A SMALL AMOUNT OF TIMBER (SAWN FIR). KHANI EMPHASIZED HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE US INTEREST IN SUPPLYING HIS AGENCY. HE DID NOT INDICATE DISSATISFACTION WITH HIS EXISTING SUPPLIERS, NOR DID HE EPXRESS INTEREST IN ANY PARTICULAR US PRODUCT, BUT HE REPEATEDLY SAID HE WANTED TO BUY US GOODS AS LONG AS THEY WERE PRICE COMPETITIVE.

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3. KHANI ADDED THAT UNDER THE FOURTH FIVE YEAR PLAN 1976-80, (NOT YET PUBLISHED), SYRIA HOPES BY 1980 TO BE PRODUCING ABOUT HALF OF ITS IRON AND STEEL NEEDS. HAMA IS THE SITE OF A DEVELOPING IRON AND STEEL MANUFACTURING COMPLEX. AN EXISTING PLANT ON THE SITE PRODUCES ABOUT 400,000 TONS OF STEEL BARS ANNUALLY, USING IMPORTED BILLETS. A SCRAP PLANT IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION (TO BE FINISHED IN 1977) WHICH WILL PRODUCE ABOUT 120,000 TONS OF BILLETS FOR THE EXISTING BAR PLANT. TWO PLANTS ARE PROJECTED FOR THE SAME HAMA SITE TO PRODUCE SHEETS AND TUBES. SYRIA HAS SOME IRON ORE (FICHES DU MONDE ARAB/BEIRUT ESTIMATES RESERVES OF UP TO 90 MILLION TONS), BUT ACCORDING TO KHANI STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THEM TO BE NOT YET ECONOMICALLY EXPLOITABLE.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: USDOC TO INFORM US FIRMS OF INCREASING AFTOMETAL INTEREST IN PURCHASING US IRON AND STEEL, CEMENT, AND TIMBER PRODUCTS, AND TO CONSIDER INCLUDING SUCH FIRMS IN FUTURE TRADE MISSIONS. EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE SENDING IN TOS TENDERED BY AFTOMETAL AND WILL PREPARE REPORTS ON PLANS FOR SYRIAN IRON AND STEEL AND CEMENT INDUSTRIES. EMBASSY FURNISHING TO CAGNE/BECK COPIES OF AFTOMETAL LITERATURE LISTING DESIRED PRODUCTS. PELLETREAU

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